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Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

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SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE CALLS FOR BETTER INFORMATION SECURITY

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence today sent the National Security Council its recommendations on information security. The Committee called for a National Strategic Security Program, a streamlined classification system, and new procedures for the authorized disclosure of classified information by Executive branch officials and press officers. The Intelligence Committee also urged immediate implementation of 13 recommendations made by the Information Security Oversight Office.

The Intelligence Committee tied recent espionage cases to "attempting to protect too much and thereby stretching personnel and other security programs too thin. The issue is not just inadequate resources, but attitudes as well."

The Committee noted "troublesome evidence of a lack of overall national policy guidance" on security and called for "a comprehensive and integrated National Strategic Security Program to coordinate and foster the protection of information and activities having the greatest strategic importance." The Committee cited similar proposals by the Information Security Oversight Office and the Stilwell Commission in the Defense Department, as well as by Senators Roth, Nunn, and--in 1957--Stennis.

The Intelligence Committee warned of "a fundamental, underlying problem in the complexity of the [information security] system." It called for a "streamlined" classification system and recommended consideration of a two-level system that would eliminate the "Confidential" classification. The Committee stated, "Rather than assuming that information is classified, the burden should be to show the need for secrecy."

To combat leaks, the Intelligence Committee sees a need to change "the underlying attitudes that foster disrespect for the rules of secrecy." The Committee calls for new "procedures [to] be followed whenever any official authorizes disclosure of classified information to the news media. The procedures should apply not only to formal statements for attribution, but also to disclosures on background."

The Intelligence Committee recommendations were sent to the National Security Council in response to an invitation from the Director of the Information Security Oversight Office, which has submitted 13 proposed initiatives to the NSC. The Committee calls the ISOO initiatives "an excellent agenda for short-term actions." It urges, "strong, publicly-stated endorsement of the President" for those and other proposals, and calls for NSC members to "hold senior executives and program managers personally responsible for effective implementation."

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